AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY RICHMOND COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS AD HOC REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE MEETING PUBLIC HEARING

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COMMITTEE MEETING PUBLIC HEARING

Before Kristy M. Williams, CVR, CCR
At Diamond Lakes Elementary School
4153 Windsor Spring Road, Hephzibah, GA 30815
On Wednesday, October 20, 2021, Commencing at 6:00 p.m.

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APPEARANCES

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Board of Elections:	Ms. Lynn Bailey
County Commissioners:	Hon. Sean Frantom Hon. Ben Hasan Hon. Alvin Mason Hon. Francine Scott
School Board Members:	Hon. Charlie Hannah Hon. Jimmy Atkins Hon. Venus Cain Hon. Helen Minchew
Legislature:	Rep. Wayne Howard Rep. Brian Prince Rep. Mark Newton Sen. Harold Jones
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dashes [] Intentional or purposeful interruption. Ellipsis [] Unfinished thought. Speech halted.	

Ellipsis [...] Unfinished thought. Speech halted.
Uh-huh Used to indicate affirmation, agreement, or gratification.
Uh-uh Used to say no or to emphasize a negative answer to a question, request, or offer.

(Words transcribed as spoken. Proper names may be phonetically spelled when correct spellings cannot be obtained.)

AD HOC COMMITTEE MEETING PUBLIC HEARING AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY

[Pursuant to O.C.G.A. 9-11-28(d), Kristy M. Williams has no contact with any of the parties or their counsel. The court reporter's charges are the usual and customary charges for services within the industry and are available upon request by either party, with no financial or services discount being given to any party named in this meeting.]

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MR. FRANTOM: All right. I am Commissioner Sean

Frantom. I am the Chair of this ad hoc committee. It's great to have y'all back for our second here at Diamond Lakes Elementary. I want to thank everybody for being here tonight. This is the second of our four redistricting meetings here.

We're here because every year the US Constitution says that we have to do a census. The census is based on what you filled out and whether you filled it out or not is -- the numbers are the numbers, and we have no ability to change those numbers.

The census is very important for federal funding as well, so as we come into the next census, please, you know, we need people to fill that out as well. Obviously, we've had population shifts in Richmond County and we're

going to talk about that, but the bottom line is that we have to have equal size and comply with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 so that every district -- your representation is the same across every district so that we have equal weight across all districts.

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I'm joined here by 11 colleagues of different aspects that you have elected whether that's the School Board, the Commissioners, or the local delegation.

The map that you're going to see tonight is a draft. It was done by an individual in the redistricting office in Atlanta, and it's just that, it's a draft. This committee has had no input into the draft, and as a committee we decided that we would not have any discussion about any changes until after our four public hearings. This is truly your time to give comments on your thoughts on the redistricting draft that you've seen and what you'd like to see changed.

Again, if you have any questions you can ask the committee members after the meeting is over. And I would like to now introduce the committee. I'll start on my left and can we pass that mic?

MR. PRINCE: You know my name.

MR. FRANTOM: Go ahead.

MR. PRINCE: Brian Prince, I'm State Representative, House District 127.

MS. MINCHEW: Helen Minchew, School Board District 1 2 at-large, District 10. 3 MR. MASON: Good evening. I'm Alvin Mason, 4 Commissioner of District 4. I'm the proud representative 5 of this school and of this district housing. Thank you so 6 much. 7 MS. CAIN: I'm Venus Cain, Richmond County School Board, District 9 at-large, and I'm also Co-Vice Chair. 8 9 MR. FRANTOM: Sean Frantom, District 7, Commissioner, 10 Chair. 11 MR. HANNAH: Charlie Hannah, Richmond County School 12 Board, District 2. 13 MS. SCOTT: Francine Scott, Commissioner, Super 14 District 9. 15 MR. HASAN: Ben Hasan, Commissioner, District 6. 16 MR. FRANTOM: Other members not here yet, I plan -- I 17 think are coming, are from the School Board; Jimmy Atkins, Representative Mark Newton, and Representative Wayne 18 Howard. Senator Harold Jones, as well, is not here yet. 19 20 All right. As we continue this process, we're going 21 to turn it over to Ms. Lynn Bailey who has over 40 years 22 of experience with the Board of Elections office and is 23 going to be leaving us at the end of the year, but -- she 24 also is joined by Travis, who's the Assistant Director.

He's been in the office for 25 years, so we're in good

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hands in Richmond County. These two individuals are respected across the State, and we look forward to hearing the presentation tonight from Ms. Bailey. Again, she's going to give you lots of good information and really explain why we're here, so I'm going to turn it over to Ms. Bailey for the presentation portion of the event.

MS. BAILEY: Okay. Good evening everybody. Thank you for coming out tonight. Thank you, Mr. Chairman for the kind introduction. I appreciate that.

MR. FRANTOM: Absolutely.

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MS. BAILEY: So we are here to talk about redistricting tonight. And I guess, the first thing I'll say is just a reminder. We're going to talk a little bit as we go further about what redistricting is, why we're doing it and whatnot. But as we proceed into it, proceed with the knowledge that we do this once every 10 years when the census data is released, and it is a -- it's a very important thing. The Chairman talked about -- earlier he talked about how we use the census data to appropriate funding for schools, and for many, many other reasons across the board, one of which is redistricting. So let's -- let's get down to it and talk about it.

So as the Chair said, the US Constitution requires that the census be taken every 10 years and y'all know that. There are two pieces to this process. One is

reapportionment which is looking at the census and deciding how the 435 members of the United States Congress are going to be spread out across the nation. So I'm sure we -- you, like I, have heard that there are states that have lost a congressional member or two this year and there are states that have gained a congressional member or two this year. The same thing happened 10 years ago and will happen again 10 years from now. And that's the reapportionment process. It's reapportioning the congressional districts across the county depending on the population.

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In addition to that, we also have redistricting. So redistricting applies within the State of Georgia and then certainly within all the local jurisdictions. And what redistricting does is it takes the new census figures, it lets the jurisdictions look at their population by district to see where they've seen growth or decline in growth or decline in population so that they can redraw their districts or redistrict to make sure that the population is evenly disbursed amongst the district so no one district has a greater voice than another. You make everything equal and that's all guaranteed under the Constitution.

So again, this is why we go through this process. We don't do the redistricting just because we have nothing

better to do. We do it because it's an equalizer. It's an equalizer for all jurisdictions. And remember too, that this has to do only with your elected districts. It doesn't have to do with other things like taxation or -- or where your children go to school. One thing has nothing to do with the other. This is about giving your elected districts all of an equal size.

So again, the redistricting committee's role is to evaluate the population, compare it to the current district lines, decide where we have growth or loss in population, develop a districting plan, and then, to pass that districting plan along to their respective government authorities for final approval.

The districting committees -- the redistricting committee's role is not to make -- make decisions regarding taxation or public safety, alter public school zones, determine property assessments, or to make policy for any type of economic development. That's not the purpose of redistricting.

So our structure here, as background for both the Commission and the School Board, we have eight single-member districts. We are tonight at this school in District 4. Is that correct, Commissioner, we're in District 4?

MR. MASON: That's correct.

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MS. BAILEY: But there are eight single-member districts across the county, and that again, applies for the School Board and the Augusta Commission. In addition to that, there are two Super Districts. We have members here, Ms. Scott and Ms. Minchew, both representing Super Districts; one from the Commission and one from the School Board. And what a Super District is, it's made up of half of each of the single-member districts. So District 9, which Ms. Scott represents, is made up of single-member districts 1, 2, 4, and 5. And District 10, which Ms.

Minchew represents is made up of Districts 3, 6, 7, and 8. So what that means to us as citizens of Richmond County is that we each vote on and are represented by two Commissioners and two members of the Board of Education.

So let's talk about the census data. Here in Richmond County we didn't see a great deal of growth from the last census, a little over 3% total growth. So in 2010, we had just over 200,000 citizens completing the census here, and in 2020, we had 206 -- excuse me, 206,607 people reporting here.

As we go along, you're going to hear a lot tonight about an ideal district size, and all that means is that since we have eight single-member districts here, we take the total population, divide it by eight, and whatever that number is, is the ideal district size for each

district once we get finished with redistricting. Makes sense.

For this year's census, the 206,607 citizens divided by 8 equals 25,607, so at the end of the day, that's the number that we hope to get close to for the total number of citizens contained in each district.

This chart is important -- lots of numbers up there, so and -- and might I just add, that all this information will be available on the redistricting website. I have a couple of copies of this presentation here tonight if anyone wants it, but lots of numbers up here to look at. The main thing I want you to look at is the very last column. What that very last column shows is it takes the ideal district size for what the districts are supposed to look like this year and it shows you how much over or under the current districts are with that ideal number. So we'll just take District 1 as an example. District 1 is showing that there are 24,519 citizens who reported in District 1. We know the ideal district size is 25 -- excuse me --

MR. HASAN: 607.

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MR. FRANTOM: 607.

MS. BAILEY: I've read the wrong numbers. 25,607.

And what this chart shows you is District 1 is -5.06%. So we have to pick up some voters in District 1 to get that

number close to the ideal district size. Y'all still with me?

AUDIENCE: [Response.]

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MS. BAILEY: So how do we even go about that? Well, we know that all the state lines, the congressional lines, the House and Senate lines will be drawn by the Georgia General Assembly. You've probably heard that they're going into special session on November 3rd, this year, in Atlanta, to redraw those lines. Likewise, local jurisdictions around the state are meeting just like we are to talk about how we want to draw our district lines and how we can even things out.

Going back to the year 2000, that was the first year that Augusta decided to form this ad hoc committee that you see sitting before -- different members, but the same structure. It was used for the first time in 2000. And we developed it because it was recognized that it was important to have the Augusta Commission districts and the School Board districts mirror each other so that you as a voter, if you were in Commission District 1, you were also in School Board District 1. Makes it easier for you to keep up with and know which district you live in. So it was important then to have the School Board and the Augusta Commission at the table talking about that at the same time. Equally as important, to have members of the

Generally Assembly involved in this discussion since they're the body that will take the plan forward and introduce it into the General Assembly for final adoption and enactment. So these three groups have come together and this will be the third decade that we've used this process for drawing our lines.

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So again, as the Chairman said, there are 12 members on the committee. We have 4 from the Commission, 4 from the School Board, 4 from the Legislative delegation.

Again, together this group, first started their work back in July. They adopted a set of guiding principles which helps them to make decisions on how the district lines are going to be drawn. Once they — they will use those guiding principles to draw a set of district lines for the city. The final plan is developed over time. Once it's approved by this committee, this committee then sends it to their respective government authorities for final approval, and then from there, it goes to the General Assembly for enactment. So that's the process.

The new plan that is enacted is what we'll use for the next 10 years, and then, we'll do it all over again 10 years from now. There are members of the committee that have introduced themselves tonight, but you can see again there are 4 from the Commission, 4 from the School Board, and 4 from the Legislature.

So the guiding principles -- the guiding principles include things like if you're (unintelligible) to the provisions in the US Constitution and those provide in the Voting Rights Act. But it also includes other non-legal requirements like this committee's desire to keep neighborhoods together where they can, and this committee's desire to keep voting precincts together where they can, and communities of interest together where they can. So all of these things will be considered by this group, as well as the legal requirements for redistricting.

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Continuing the work flow, as the Chairman said, at the onset of this process, we received -- the committee received a map that was prepared by the State Redistricting Office in Atlanta. And this was drawn by a professional mapper, and what this individual did is looked at our existing districts, analyzed where they were over-populated and under-populated and drew what was, in their opinion, and minimal-change map, so in other words, making as little change to the existing district as possible. These are the maps that are around the room. There are two in the back and there's one out in this lobby.

We're not going to go into a whole lot of detail tonight about the changes that are recommended on these

maps, but if you'll recall in the slide earlier, you saw the column that showed the over and under for each of the districts. Those are all taken into consideration on this -- on these maps.

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And we're also going to talk a little bit later about the website that -- that's been developed. So with that website, you could actually zoom in down to -- you can see your house and in what district it's in and whether it's being suggested that we should move that neighborhood to one district or the other.

And you know, as you proceed with your analysis of the draft district maps, please do so with the knowledge that, again, as the Chair said, these are absolutely non-binding, it is truly just a jumping off point for this committee to do their work. We're looking for -- the committee is looking for input from you all to tell us what you want to see in a districting map. And that's why we want you guys to sign up and tell us what you think. That's why the committee is here tonight, is to hear from you.

So as you know the committee will conduct a series of public hearings. This is the second one of four, so if you get to looking at this stuff when you get home and you see something you would like for the committee to hear about from you, please come back to one of the two public

hearings that will be next Monday and next Wednesday and sign up. You know, this one, I think -- I guess, the one Monday is at Richmond Academy, and the one Wednesday is at Wheeless Road Elementary School, so there are two more opportunities.

And in addition to that, going back to the website, there's a public portal there, so if you don't want to come out in person just type your comments in that public portal. All of those are compiled and distributed to the committee members, and they'll look at those as they set about their work.

There you go. There's you public hearing schedule.

All the public hearings are going to begin at 6:00. Sign up will be available from 5:30 until 6:00. There is a way you can attend virtually. There is a phone number that you can call into and come through on a speaker phone to talk to the committee if you don't want to come in person. They are limiting the speaker comments to two minutes.

And then, you know, as I said earlier, all those comments will be compiled and given to the committee members for their review when they draw the plans.

Just real quick about the website, there is -- there really is a lot of information out there. The list of important dates, to know when the next committee meetings and so on are out there. The citizen input portal, the

names and contact information for the committee members, there are frequently asked questions that are being developed and put out there everyday, a copy of the full guiding principles that this committee will use is on the website, as well as that interactive map.

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And the one thing I didn't mention about that interactive map, when you redistrict, the fact of the matter is, that there are going to be neighborhoods and communities that are split. It's really hard to strike that balance without that happening in different places around the city.

I know that 10 years ago when the redistricting was completed, I think there were 10 neighborhoods -- 11, because we didn't -- we decided we didn't have Woodlake on the list, but there are 11 neighborhoods that were split back 10 years ago. There are an additional 4 with these draft districts that are set up to be split in order to get the population equally distributed. So using this interactive map, you can look at all the neighborhoods. You can lay down a layer that will show you exactly which neighborhoods are split, or if you're not in to all that there's just a print out on there that shows which neighborhoods have been split in this draft map.

The meeting vidoes tonight and all the other meetings and public hearings that we've had, they're all available

on the website, as well as, transcripts, and agendas, and any presentations that we've done. All that information is out there and you know, we put that out there because this group is very eager to solicit public comment and hear from you all about what you would like to see in your plan.

Next committee meeting is November 10th. That will be at the Board of Education offices on Broad Street.

That will not be a public hearing. That will be a regular working meeting of this -- of this committee. Though again, just as a reminder, you do have two more public hearings in addition to the one tonight and those will be next Monday and Wednesday. And that's it. Thank you very much.

MR. FRANTOM: All right. Thank you, Lynn. Appreciate that great information.

MS. BAILEY: Yes, sir.

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MR. FRANTOM: I'm remiss to say thank you to the School Board IT Department for sharing this on YouTube tonight. And those tuning in can call 706-826-1304 that would like to give any form of comment in two minutes.

Again, 706-826-1304. Again, thank you to the School Board and all they've done to make these four locations possible and all the IT that they've done. Also, I want to thank Attorney Pete Fletcher, and Attorney Rachel Mack. Y'all

have been with us at every meeting and I appreciate your time and dedication to help us.

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Tonight, as we get the public speaking portion of the event started, you'll have two minutes to speak. There will be a timer behind me, as well as, you will have comments only. Again, if you have any questions for this committee, you can do it at the conclusion to any of the members here once the -- once the meeting concludes.

Again, two minutes to speak, and I think if you have not signed up, if there's anybody that still wants to sign up for the two minutes let us know since the crowd -- we want to make sure that we give you that opportunity for anyone that came in late to give comments for two minutes. If you would like to speak, go ahead and sign up, or be ready here in just a second.

All right. Our first presenter to speak is Mr. John Baynard. When you come to the podium, sir, please state your name and address for the record.

MR. BAYNARD: John Baynard.

MR. FRANTOM: Can you remove the mask, so we can hear
you clearly?

MR. BAYNARD: John Baynard, 2820 Cross Creek Road, Quail Hollow, Quail Ridge Subdivision.

MR. FRANTOM: All right, sir. Thank you for being here.

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MR. BAYNARD: And I just want to make a comment that was brought to my attention, which I didn't know. In the past, we have two commissioners that's actually overseeing District 4, basically District 4 and 5 is combined. And I live in District 4 you have -- let me get my thoughts right.

MR. FRANTOM: No, you're fine.

MR. BAYNARD: I feel that there should be one commissioner per district, unless protocol calls for someone to do extra duty or a slot is open or whatever the case maybe. But I feel that it'd be a conflict of interest in my thoughts. I think one commissioner per district. That's all I have.

MR. FRANTOM: Thank you. Is there anyone else that would like to come forward to give comments.

MR. MASON: Hey Sean, can you explain how the government is set up, just to answer that question?

MR. FRANTOM: Yeah.

MR. MASON: I mean, that's --

MR. FRANTOM: So we kind of just went over this, sir, but basically you have two representatives because you have eight districts and then you have one super district over four districts.

MR. BAYNARD: I understand.

MR. FRANTOM: So it's the way the government was set

1 up in 1995.

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UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think it's (unintelligible).

MR. FRANTOM: Oh, okay. Yeah, so again, this is one of the tasks of the committee's is that, you know, we're going to try and put some of the subdivisions back together, understanding we can't put them all back together, but we're going to do our best. I mean, that's the reason that, you know, we have these public hearings is to hear the concerns of people that want their subdivisions back together, so we appreciate those comments for sure. Thank you, sir.

All right. One last call for those on YouTube, 706-826-1304.

All right. One last call for anyone in the building that would like to come forward to give public comment for two minutes.

All right. Well, on behave of the committee we want to thank everyone for coming out tonight for the redistricting meeting. We hope you've learned a few things about it. Make sure you check out the website, and make sure you don't leave without the packet of information. Sir? Would you like to come forward, sir?

MR. WILLIAMS: If you about to end your meeting.

MR. FRANTOM: Uh-huh.

MR. WILLIAMS: Good, you don't have comments.

.. WILLIAMS: Good, you don't have comme

MR. FRANTOM: You can come there and say what you'd like.

MR. WILLIAMS: I didn't sign up.

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MR. FRANTOM: That's fine. You go ahead, sir. Just state your name and address for the record into the mic for me please.

MR. WILLIAMS: Excuse me. I'm James Williams and I live in District 5. I'm also president of HOPE, Helping Our People to Excel. And as this process proceeds, I'm really somewhat surprised that you don't have anymore people wanting to make comments than what we do, and the purpose of this meeting. But as this gentlemen just spoke, and I heard him, and I don't know how much was understood from what he was saying, maybe he understood in terms of the way the process is, but there is a concern that all of us will have. And that is one of all, that you indicate as a committee that you -- you're going to be fair and you want to be fair in your decisions in terms of the redistricting that you keep like communities together, communities of interest together, and that's my main concern. And I know its maps there that they were very hard for me to read and understand really -- fine tune down to, I think you mentioned it, to the streets that you can zoom in on I believe, in terms of viewing the maps. Well, I wasn't able to do that with the little apparatuses

that I have. I call it apparatuses, but I was able to somewhat be definitive in that the area that I live in, which is right up the road here in Green Forest subdivision, that might be a part of the separation to be added to District 4. Am I right in that? And I know there's not supposed to be any dialog --

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MR. FRANTOM: Yeah, and again, we can head to the map as soon as we conclude and have this discussion with you as well to make sure you get your answers, sir.

MR. WILLIAMS: Yeah, but my concern as a resident in the Green Forest subdivision is that you have one, I know two-like communities which is right now across the street, and the current draft will separate those two communities, which are strong communities and it would be my and our concern that those two communities remain the same, and that's where we get into the point of keeping like communities together, communities of interest together, that they remain the same. I know it's on the outer fringes of the -- of the map in terms of boundaries, but to separate us from where we are and to include us into another community that -- that likeness is not there because we're not a part of the community now. So in your decision-making, we would hope that you would keep like communities together as you indicated and that you not separate them where they will not be a community of

1 interest anymore.

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MR. FRANTOM: And thank you, sir. Can you state your address just for the record please?

MR. WILLIAMS: You not going to coming looking for me are you?

MR. FRANTOM: No, we just -- we just like to have everything official.

MR. WILLIAMS: I live at 3408 Pine Hill Road, right up here off of Morgan Road in Green Forest subdivision.

MR. FRANTOM: Thank you. Appreciate those comments.

Appreciate you coming forward.

MS. BAILEY: May I make a clarifying statement?

MR. FRANTOM: Sure.

MR. MASON: Sure.

MS. BAILEY: So just to clarify, the maps that were initially put out on the website were just static pdf files, so you couldn't see but so much, but that's -- but go back and look again. We now have this interactive map it's called and if you've ever looked up an address say on Google Maps or something, it works in a very similar way. You could just get right down in there and see the actual street, the houses that are on the street, the street names, and what district their in, and the whole thing. So take another look at it and it should be much improved over the last three or four weeks. Okay. Thank you.

MR. FRANTOM: All right. Last call. Anyone else? 1 2 Okay. Well, reminding you that we have two more public hearings Monday at ARC, and then, next Wednesday at 3 4 Wheeless Road Elementary. I want to thank my committee 5 for being here tonight again. And if you have any 6 questions, again, we are here to answer any of your 7 questions. Just let us know. And thank you all for coming out tonight. 8 9 {Public hearing concluded at 6:40 p.m.} 10 // 11 // // 12 13 // 14 // 15 // 16 // 17 // 18 // // 19 20 // // 21 22 // 23 // 24 // // 25

CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

I hereby certify that the foregoing transcript consisting of pages numbered 4 through 24 has been transcribed from a digital recording of the audio; and said hearing was reported by the method of Stenomask;

I further certify that I am not kin or counsel to the parties in the case, am not in the regular employ of counsel or said parties, nor am I otherwise interested in the result of said case.

This the 31st day of October, 2021.

Kristy M. Williams

KRISTY WILLIAMS, CVR, CCR CERTIFIED COURT REPORTER GEORGIA CERTIFICATE #5120-9739-4045-7472

